

VZCZCXRO7750
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHAE #0338 0871328
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 281328Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8801
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 6077
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1323
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1500
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0019
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000338

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: TROUBLED TIMES FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH

REF: 06 ASMARA 1058

Classified By: AMBASSADOR SCOTT H. DELISI FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) The Catholic Church continues to endure harassment and pressure from the Government of Eritrea (GSE) as the GSE insists that priests and seminarians participate in military training. In a meeting with Emboff on March 26, the Catholic Bishop of Asmara, Menghesteab Tesfamarian (protect) said he was recently visited by the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, Semare Beyin. In this meeting Semare again pressed Bishop Menghisteab to comply with the GSE request and provide the list of priests and seminarians. Semare reportedly told Bishop Menghesteab that the "Orthodox, Protestants and the Muslims have all agreed." Bishop Menghesteab told Emboff he will not/not provide the list as military service violates the vows of the priests and seminarians and he is prepared for whatever the consequences may be, including detention or his removal by the GSE as head of the Catholic Church.

12. (C) While the priests and seminarians of the Catholic Church continue their face-off with the GSE, the GSE summoned the foreign missionaries of all the Catholic orders to a meeting to discuss their residency permits. As reported reftel, the foreign missionaries, primarily nuns, had been facing difficulties for the past five to six months in obtaining renewed residency permits from the Immigration Office. Upon receiving the letter from Immigration, according to the Italian Deputy Chief of Mission, Marco Lapadura, the foreign missionaries in discussion with Eritrean Catholic Secretariat decided not to attend the meeting. In the past, these meetings were opportunities for Immigration to present individuals with notification of their expulsion from Eritrea. Thus, the Catholic Secretariat responded in writing and the GSE provided them with a 30-day reprieve. One of the American nuns told Emboff that she anticipated this 30-day period to be a grace period and that she was preparing for her departure. In all, nine nuns and two monks from various orders, including the Ursaline, Capuchines and Filippini, are facing expulsion. The nationality breakdown is: six Italian citizens, one Mexican citizen, one Colombian citizen and three American citizens.

13. (C) The justification for the expulsion remains unclear. A 2002 GSE proclamation does exist, stating that all foreign missionaries are permitted to remain in Eritrea for up to two years. According to Father Abraha (protect) of the Asmara Catholic Cathedral, the intent is for foreigners to come to

Eritrea, train Eritreans and then leave. Yet, up until now, the GSE has not applied the proclamation. One monk postulated to Lapadura that the GSE decision is an extension of the 2005 NGO proclamation and part of the GSE's efforts to remove all foreign "eyes and ears" from the country.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The Catholic Church's refusal to provide the list of seminarians and priests to the GSE may lead eventually to more serious troubles for the leadership of the Catholic Church, including the arrest or removal of the current bishop. The GSE request to the foreign missionaries falls in line with its on-going efforts to limit the number of community organizations, such as NGOs, run by foreigners in Eritrea. The GSE already restricts travel by foreigners in Eritrea, and the decision to remove the nuns and monks who have direct access to the people appears to be a continuation of GSE policy to control what the outside world may learn about what is really happening in the country. We anticipate the GSE's policy of limiting and controlling social institutions to continue as the GSE continues to maintain its tight control over Eritrean society. End Comment.
DeLisi